



Edgewood Highland Elementary School

Cranston

SALT Visit Team Report

October 29, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the visit to Edgewood Highland Elementary School from October 24, 2000-October 29, 2000 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- ◆ Student Learning
- ◆ Teaching
- ◆ The School

The design of the SALT visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Edgewood Highland Elementary School was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, there is simply no substitute for being at the school while it is in session in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a team visit is about how the students, staff and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Edgewood Highland Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 81 full classroom observations and 22 partial classroom observations which totaled over 93 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 8 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*

- *School Improvement Team*
- *school and district administrators*
- *students*
- *parents*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- ◆ *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works! data*
- ◆ *review of district and school policies*
- ◆ *review of professional development activities*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *Edgewood Highland School Improvement Plan*
 - *Cranston Public Schools strategic plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 28 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms, with teachers and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators. The team sought to develop conclusions, commendations and recommendations in the three focus areas that, in its judgment, would be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning.

The team reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.

It is important to note that this report reflects a “moment” in the life of the school. The conclusions here are different from those that can be made from statewide assessment data or from information collected and analyzed by members of the school. This report is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a different lens, one not clouded by the daily life of the school. This new lens is one through which the school can look to help focus on important issues resulting in the development of strategies for overall improvement in the teaching and learning process.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the Team. The value will be determined by how Edgewood Highland Elementary School responds to the report. At first, the critical criteria will be the thoughtfulness of that response and later it will be its actual effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. The response of the faculty and staff will be most critical early on but later there is a shared responsibility to support the school in making progress. The School Department, the citizens of Cranston, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in context with the conclusions. That is the way they were written.

2. PROFILE OF Edgewood Highland Elementary School

Edgewood Highland Elementary School has two hundred and twenty-four students in the pre-kindergarten through fifth grades. The school has a professional staff of one administrator, 30 full and part time faculty, and 12 support personnel. Forty-nine percent of Edgewood Highland's students are white, 25 percent are Hispanic, 17 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and nine percent are Black. Thirty-nine percent of Edgewood Highland students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Twenty-nine percent of students have limited English proficiency and 20 percent receive special education services.

Located in the Edgewood neighborhood in the City of Cranston, Edgewood Highland School is one of eighteen public elementary schools in the city. Edgewood Highland elementary school is the third ranked Title 1 school in the city, bringing additional federal funds to supplement literacy instruction. The school first opened its doors in 1970. A restructuring occurred in 1995 that changed the school from a fifth-sixth grade school to a kindergarten-fifth grade structure. Also, at that time, major reconstruction was also done to change Edgewood Highland from an open classroom configuration to several enclosed classrooms. A preschool was added in 1997.

In the 2000 Information Works!, (1999 scores) gender equity gaps are evident in Problem Solving in Mathematics. Equity gaps are also evident between poverty and non-poverty students in the Writing Effectiveness subtest of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. Notably, there is no equity gap between regular education and special education students. For further information on state assessment results for Edgewood Highland School, go to: <http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/>

Several initiatives benefit the students of Edgewood Highland School, such as a reading incentive program, overseen by the school's librarian and its Title One consultants. This program, now in its 10th year, may be a contributing factor in the positive reading test results achieved by students. Additionally, Edgewood Highland has an active Parent Teacher Organization, which meets on a regular basis.

3. PORTRAIT OF Edgewood Highland Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Edgewood Highland School is home to an eager and polite student body and a hardworking staff. The obvious and genuine respect, fondness, and commitment that students, the professional staff, and the building administrator exhibit toward one another is palpable. Edgewood Highland nurtures its diverse student body, making every student feel at home. The staff and the principal truly embrace the gift of children through their dedication and commitment to them. All children are valued.

While some wonderful examples of professional practice are clearly evident, many teachers are not employing the full range of instructional practice necessary to help students understand rigorous content and concepts and apply their knowledge in challenging assignments. Teachers struggle valiantly to improve instruction, without the assistance of intensive, high quality, appropriate, and effective professional development, geared to addressing their instructional needs. Their efforts to deliver high quality instruction have been hindered by the lack of a coordinated and comprehensive professional development plan.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*

Conclusions

Although there is evidence that students are able to communicate ideas in writing, there appears to be little evidence that children are able to develop authentic texts for a variety of audiences and purposes. This coincides with their performance on the *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam*. The following percentages of Edgewood Highland's students met or exceeded the standard in the following subtests: Effectiveness - 31 percent, and Conventions - 12 percent. Twenty-four percent of third grade students met or exceeded the standard on the *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*. (*examination of student work, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam English Language Arts School Summary Report, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

Students are actively engaged in mathematical activities. Their work demonstrates that they are stronger in computational skills than in problem solving. Although students are engaged in problem solving, they are not employing the full range of problem solving strategies. In addition, they do not work collaboratively to think about, discuss, and solve problems. In the problem solving portion of the *2000 New Standards Reference Exam*, there were no students who met the standard. Other portions of the *2000 New Standards Reference Exam* in mathematics; concepts – 12 percent of students meeting the standard, and skills – 46 percent meeting the standard, confirm that students' knowledge in mathematical concepts and skills are limited. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam Mathematics School Summary Report*)

Students love to read, maintain positive attitudes about the discipline, value reading activities, and choose to read. Most students, by grade three, are proficient readers, can decode text, will self correct their mistakes, and view themselves as readers. However, fewer students can compare and contrast, make predictions, analyze and interpret text, and draw inferences. This corresponds with their performance on the *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam*. The following percentages of students at Edgewood Highland met or exceeded the standard in the following subtests: Reading: Basic Understanding - 77 percent, Reading: Analysis and Interpretation - 58 percent. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam English Language Arts School Summary Report*)

The students at Edgewood Highland are eager and active participants in the learning process. They are confident; like their school and their teachers. The students are welcoming to newcomers and engaging with adults. They treat each other equally, fairly, and celebrate each other's cultural differences. Students at this school are part of a family of brothers and sisters, who may disagree sometimes, but care deeply for one

another. They contribute to the true sense of community present in this school through their actions, deeds, and student council. (*conversations and interviews with students, classroom observations, meetings with parents, students, and school administrator*)

Commendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School

The students are respectful, eager, and value learning, each other, and adults.

The student council provides positive leadership role models for their peers.

Recommendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School:

Examine the “What Students Need” section of the *New Standards Reference Exam School Summary* reports for the past three years and use that to inform the scope and sequence of the curricula.

Encourage students to continue their dedication to each other, eagerness, respectfulness, and thirst for knowledge.

Encourage students to continue to be a positive voice in this school.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meetings with school improvement team, parents, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ Edgewood Highland SALT Visit Handbook
- ◆ *The Rhode Island Reading Policy*

Conclusions

Teachers are very generous with their time, provide positive feedback, and give children extra help and individualized attention. They are exemplary role models, gentle, and loving. They are enthusiastic, energetic, and responsive to their students' emotional needs. Teachers present a strong sense of collegiality, collectively take responsibility for all students in the building, voluntarily collaborate, and design flexible school structures in an attempt to meet individual learner needs. (*conversations and with students and teachers, classroom observations, following students, meetings with parents, students, and school administrator*)

Students are given opportunities to write in journals and respond to writing prompts. The opportunities for students to participate in formal writing instruction, writing workshop and in the content areas are infrequent. The majority of writing flows from writing prompts and skills-based assignments designed to teach the conventions of spelling and punctuation. Many classroom assignments provide too few opportunities to develop students' abilities to write purposefully, creatively and effectively, for different audiences and different genres. (*examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students*)

Teachers are making a genuine effort to improve student performance in mathematics through an increased focus on problem solving. These efforts are being hindered by a lack of ongoing, in-depth professional development that concentrates on higher order mathematical skills and performance based assessments. The tasks presented to students are not appropriately benchmarked and often lack rigor and challenge necessary to help students meet the standards. (*examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, Edgewood Highland SALT Visit Handbook*)

Through their own initiative, teachers are seeking strategies to improve their ability to assess student performance, however, a clear understanding of how to use rubrics for both an instructional and assessment tool varies greatly from teacher to teacher. In some places, teachers have neither a consistent, nor a

comprehensive approach to assessment. They use chapter tests and dittos that are traditional, rather than portfolios, projects, exhibitions, and/or other forms of authentic assessment. (*examination of Edgewood Highland School SALT Visit Handbook, Examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students*)

Teachers are making a determined effort to use instructional strategies they believe best meet the needs of their students. Some teachers are creating challenging, engaging and stimulating learning experiences and are designing instruction that provides learners with a variety of ways to work toward the standard. However, in many classrooms, there is an over reliance on prepared materials that focus on the development and application of low level skills, rather than high order level thinking skills. Additionally, in some classes, teachers are using developmentally inappropriate materials. The present scope and sequence of professional development has contributed to these inconsistencies. (*conversations and interviews with students and teachers, Edgewood Highland School SALT Visit Handbook, examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students*)

Teachers have begun using a new reading series, which is being introduced grade by grade. They are also using a variety of high quality trade books to expose students to a variety of genre. They have created print-rich environments and are implementing the major components of reading and phonemic awareness, structured phonics, fluency, comprehension skills, and motivation to read—with varying levels of emphasis and sophistication. While some teachers are effectively emphasizing reading analysis and interpretation, other teachers focus on literal understanding and factual recollection. Reading consultants are being used very effectively for in-class instruction to provide leveled grouping; however, ‘pull-out’ supplementary Title I reading instruction sometimes occurs at the same time as regular class instruction, which deprives the learner of additional instructional time. (*examination of classroom textbooks, examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, meeting with students*)

Commendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School:

The staff, teachers, and principal are exceptionally dedicated to students.

There is a strong sense of collegiality, which exists among all members of this learning community.

Recommendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School:

As a school, collectively investigate opportunities to develop appropriate standards-based instructional and assessment practices and engage in on-going professional development.

Ensure that all staff has a common understanding of how to effectively implement standards-based instructional and assessment practices through professional development opportunities.

Continue to foster the strong sense of community that exists at this school.

Increase opportunities for students to regularly participate in the writing process and write for different audiences and genres. Increase the amount of writing throughout the curriculum.

Examine the current problem-solving activities and assignments for rigor and challenge and provide opportunities everyday for students to apply their knowledge of mathematical skills and concepts to problem solve.

Supplement the basic reading program with additional high quality literature, containing an increased

emphasis on diverse cultures and age appropriate text.

Increase explicit comprehension instruction with opportunities for children to read and discuss quality literature (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) focusing on sounds and language, but also making predictions, drawing conclusions, and making inferences as outlined in the *Rhode Island Reading Policy*.

Recommendations for the Cranston School District:

Assist the school in identifying and providing high-quality professional development opportunities focused on appropriate standards-based instructional and assessment practices.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *1999 SALT Survey results*
- ◆ School Improvement Plan
- ◆ Cranston Public Schools District Strategic Plan
- ◆ Cranston Public Schools District Budget
- ◆ Elementary Principals Handbook
- ◆ Review of Edgewood Highland SALT Visit Handbook

Conclusions

This school believes that all members of this learning community are brothers and sisters and everyone is embraced as family. This is the school's greatest attribute. Children are cherished above all else. This creates a safe, secure, nurturing environment conducive to learning. (*meetings with students, parents, school administrator, classroom observations, school observations, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, and staff*)

The school and district have made the adoption of standards-based education a primary focus. These emerging efforts are hindered by the lack of clear and focused instructional leadership at the school and district level. This is needed to increase the quality and nature of instruction and assessment so that all students achieve at high levels. (*meetings with parents, school, and district administrators, Elementary Principals Handbook, classroom observations*)

Resources to adequately meet the needs of this school's population are not available. There are insufficient instructional personnel to reduce class size and support intensive academic instruction. The district strategic plan clearly states an objective on technology, yet, the burden of selecting and purchasing technological resources are a school-based responsibility. (*meetings with parents, school, and district administrators, Cranston Public Schools District Strategic Plan, review of Cranston Public Schools District Budget*)

Teachers have a genuine desire to improve professional practice and have engaged in numerous and varied professional development activities. These activities have been aligned with the school improvement plan as well as teachers' individual professional development needs. The schoolwide effectiveness of these activities has been hindered by the lack of a coordinated and focused plan for high-quality professional development at the school and district level. This lack of a focused and sustained effort limits both school and district attempts to provide teachers with the tools and supports they need to deepen students' understanding in all classes and all grades. (*meetings with school administrator, classroom observations, school observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff, review of professional development activities found in Edgewood Highland SALT Visit Handbook, School Improvement Plan, Professional Development Institute booklet*)

Edgewood Highland School has developed a School Improvement Plan with broad tactics and goals. This plan is a good start that would benefit from a stronger tie to information about student achievement and further refinement and enhancement of the action plans. (*review of School Improvement Plan, meeting with School Improvement Team*)

A small core of active members of the Parents Teacher Organization has shown exceptional dedication and effort to be working partners with the school. Ninety-eight percent of parents responding to SALT Survey feel that the school views parents as welcomed partners. Although there is a clear desire, the school is unsure of how to effectively engage its English as a Second Language- parent population. Some parents at Edgewood Highland School feel that they are not adequately valued as a resource; the school's *Five-Year Vision* describes a limited view of the parents' role. (*Review of School Improvement Plan, meetings with parents and school administrator, conversations and interviews with teachers, 1999 SALT Survey results*)

Commendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School for:

The school culture is strong, positive, and child-centered.

Recommendations for Edgewood Highland Elementary School:

Increase the focus on instructional leadership.

Develop a comprehensive professional development plan that provides teachers with the tools and supports they need to deepen students understanding in all classes and all grades. Find the balance between providing teachers with a common framework to move the school and district forward and balancing individual teacher needs.

Use the available information on student performance, *Information Works!*, and the conclusions and recommendations found in this SALT report to revise your School Improvement Plan.

Increase and diversify the opportunities for parents to volunteer and contribute—in non-fund raising capacities—at both the classroom and school level.

Recommendations for the Cranston School District:

Refine the course offerings provided through the Professional Development Institute. Include more advanced courses that lead to deeper levels of sophistication so teachers can develop more advanced levels of proficiency from year to year.

Provide the resources necessary for the school to implement the technology objective in the district's strategic plan.

Develop a comprehensive professional development plan for the district that provides teachers with the tools and supports they need to deepen students' understanding in all grades and all schools.

7. Final Advice to the School

Edgewood Highland School is truly a child-centered environment. Our team could not help but notice the abundant caring, compassion, nurturing, and respect that permeate the school. The overarching need of the school and its most powerful strategy for school improvement is a comprehensive and unified professional development plan that builds a common understanding of standards based instruction and assessment.

When reading and reflecting on this report, the school and its community should bear in mind that by design, the SALT report is not a celebration of all the wonderful things taking place in this school; rather, it is a presentation of those items that in the team's judgment, the school and community must focus on to help aid students at all achievement levels to perform at higher levels. As you work with this SALT report, we hope you realize that our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations are designed to help you make this child centered school better meet the needs of your students, for that is unquestionably the intent of our team.

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Teacher

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Harold Jackson

Teacher

Walter Jeschke

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New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Edgewood Highland Elementary School

October 29, 2000

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I have reviewed this report, observed a portion of the visit, and discussed the conduct of the full visit with the Visit Chair. Based on my knowledge derived from these sources of evidence, using the criteria specified in the *Endorsing SALT Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition*), I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. The conclusions and all other content of this report meet the criteria specified for a SALT Visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
November 9, 2000

